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## The *Summum Bonum* in Aristotle's Ethics

### Fractured Goodness

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Among the wise, some used to think that beyond these many good things there is some other good, something in its own right (*ti kath'hauto einai*), which is the cause of the goodness of all these good things. (*EN* 1095a26–8)

### I Preliminary Problems with Aristotle's Anti-Platonism about the Good

The nineteenth-century Aristotelian commentator J. A. Stewart had a problem with Aristotle's anti-Platonism in moral metaphysics. In particular, Stewart found himself flummoxed by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6, with its stinging rejection of Plato's approach to goodness: 'It is difficult to understand a man of Aristotle's calibre attacking, as he does, a theory like this...' After all, Stewart observed, 'his own philosophy of human life, with its ideal of the *θεωρητικὸς βίος* [*theôrêtikos bios*, the contemplative life], and its doctrine of *εὐδαιμονία* [*eudaimonia*, happiness or human flourishing] as something not to be counted among particular good things (*EN* I.7–8), is in entire sympathy with it'.<sup>1</sup> Stewart is distressed not by the bare fact of Aristotle's anti-Platonism, but rather because, as he sees things, Aristotle seeks to

<sup>1</sup> Stewart 1892 vol. I, 74. A different nineteenth-century commentator, Alexander Grant, took a rather more jaundiced view when commenting on the same arguments of *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6: 'Everyone has felt the unsatisfactoriness of these arguments; they seem captious, verbal, unreal, and not to touch the point at issue' (1885 vol. I, 208). More characteristic of the present time is the appraisal of Jacques: 'Aristotle's seven arguments against the universal Good are condensed in seventy-four lines of Greek text, perhaps the most succinct and incisive ethical-metaphysical critique of the concept of Good to be found anywhere in the history of philosophy. Together they constitute a necessary step in Aristotle's design for a new ethics, dismantling the Platonic architectonic in order to refashion his own humanistic study of the particular good for man, without which first negative effort the very concept of a non-universal Good would be incomprehensible' (1998, 321–2).

undermine a Platonic view of the good whose core commitments he himself endorses. Surely a man of Aristotle's calibre could not have failed to notice this obvious convergence?

Stewart's perplexity is in one way entirely understandable. It is understandable because, just as he observes, Aristotle expressly defends *eudaimonia* as the highest good for human beings (*EN* 1094a21–2).<sup>2</sup> *Eudaimonia* alone, according to Aristotle, satisfies the criteria he sets for this office, because it is (i) superordinate to all other human goods; (ii) sought for itself; (iii) sought for nothing beyond itself; (iv) something whose possession renders a life perfected or complete (*teleion*); and, finally, (v) something the possession of which renders life self-sufficient or lacking in nothing (*autarkes*) (*EN* 1094a1–22; 1097a25–34; 1097b6–16).

To this extent, Aristotle does seem entirely in sympathy with Plato's contention that there is a *summum bonum*, a good to which all other good things are subordinate and from which, ultimately, these lesser goods derive their share of goodness. Indeed, Aristotle expressly says that *eudaimonia* is the 'source and cause of good things' (*archên de kai aition tôn agathôn*, *EN* 1102a3–4); that is, the cause which makes other, subordinate goods good.<sup>3</sup> After all, he insists, were there no highest good serving as the ultimate end of all intentional action,<sup>4</sup> all human desire would be empty and futile (*EN* 1094a20–1).<sup>5</sup> So, since human action is not after all pointless, there must be some end to every chain of intentional action. Finally, though, when reflecting on the ends of intentional chains, Aristotle comes to what may seem a strikingly and so far unwarrantedly Platonic conclusion by ruling out the possibility of a plurality of discrete final goods. One might, that is, in principle embrace Aristotle's point about intentional action by imagining that different teleological chains eventuate in sundry, equally final ends, no one of which is sub- or superordinate to any other. Aristotle, however, like Plato before him, rejects this

<sup>2</sup> For various formulations of the suggestion that there is a highest or best good, cf. *EN* highest (*akrotaton*, 1095a15–18); best (*ariston*, 1097b22–3); finest and most pleasant (*ariston kai kalliston kai hêdiston*, 1099a24–5).

<sup>3</sup> Just how Aristotle understands the causative force of *eudaimonia* with respect to subordinate goods is controversial. Tricot 1959, 79 n. 3 asserts without further comment that it is a final cause. Segvic, more fully, contends: 'A conception of happiness is a general framework within which the good of any given good is evaluated, and fixed. An agent's goals, [Aristotle] thinks, are context-dependent; they have full value only within a perspective that puts them in relationship with other goals. In this sense the good, happiness, invests them with value' (2004, 106). Left unanswered in this formulation, however, is the question of *how* the final good invests an agent's goals with value.

<sup>4</sup> 'If, then, (i) there is some end in the sphere of our [intentional] actions which we wish for because of itself and (ii) because of which we wish for other things, and (iii) we do not choose everything because of something else—for, if we do, things will proceed in this way to infinity, so that desire will be empty and futile—then clearly this would be *the* good, that is, the best good' (*EN* 1094a18–22).

<sup>5</sup> He also affirms this view with a parallel consideration a bit later in the same book (*EN* 1097a30–4): 'Now we call that which is in itself worthy of pursuit *more final* than that which is worthy of pursuit for the sake of something else, and that which is never desirable for the sake of something else more final than the things that are desirable both in themselves and for the sake of that other thing, and therefore we call *final without qualification* that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else.'

possibility, by emphasizing that the final good of all intentional action is precisely one, and not several or many (*EN* 1094a18–22).

So far, then, Aristotle evidently embraces the broadly Platonic thought, conveyed so vividly in the analogy of the sun of *Republic* V,<sup>6</sup> that there is a single, highest good<sup>7</sup>—at least, at any rate, that there is a single, highest good *for human beings*.<sup>8</sup>

In another way, however, Stewart's perplexity is itself perplexing. In *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6, Aristotle undertakes to refute in overt terms Plato's conviction (as portrayed by Aristotle<sup>9</sup>) that goodness is 'something common, universal, and one' (*koinon ti katholou kai hen*, *EN* 1096a28). As Aristotle understands his duty,<sup>10</sup> he must bow to piety before friendship and so refute the theory of the universal good, even though it causes him grief to do so:

We had perhaps better consider the universal good and run through the puzzles concerning what is meant by it—even though this sort of investigation is unwelcome to us, because those who introduced the Forms are friends of ours. Yet presumably it would be the better course to destroy even what is close to us, as something necessary for preserving the truth—and all the more so, given that we are philosophers. For though we love them both, piety bids us to honour the truth before our friends. (*EN* 1096a11–17)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For an investigation of the precise commitments of Plato's analogy of the sun, see Shields 2008.

<sup>7</sup> White is alert to the Platonic complexion of Aristotle's conception of goodness: 'The good is an end, something aimed at, and Aristotle takes it that the best good must be, as we saw, most *ultimately* aimed at or most final or endlike. Indeed... he says that it must be most unqualifiedly final. I think that we see at work here the Platonic notion of an unqualified predication, of something's being thus-and-so without qualification and without the impurity of having the contrary predicate also hold of it. Thus, the fully final end is the thing that is unqualifiedly an end in the sense that it is not at all also a way-station on the road to, or a contributory part of, anything else' (1981, 234).

<sup>8</sup> In saying that Aristotle recognizes a highest good for human beings, I do not mean to commit him to the so-called 'grand end' view of practical reason, which I understand to comprise three theses: (i) practical reason requires the existence of an explicit and comprehensive vision or 'blueprint' of the final end; (ii) this blueprint guides deliberation; and (iii) choices made by the practically wise person can be explained and justified in terms of this blueprint. Broadie 1991 and McDowell 1996 find reason to doubt that Aristotle accepts some such 'grand end' conception of the final good; Kraut 1993 counters that Aristotle in fact subscribes to some version of the grand end view. Kraut provides compelling reasons for his ascription, but the view here ascribed to Aristotle could equally be endorsed by those suspicious of ascribing this view to Aristotle.

<sup>9</sup> There is a fair question as to whether Aristotle's characterization of Plato's commitment to the univocity of goodness is accurate. Partly because I think it is accurate and partly because the accuracy of his ascription, interesting and important as it is, is peripheral to the main topic of this current discussion, I will adopt the practice of accepting Aristotle's characterization of Plato as apt, and will mainly refer to the view under attack in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 as Plato's view, though I will also speak more broadly of its Academic provenance. On Plato's metaphysics of goodness, see Shields 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Whether intended or not, there seems an echo in Aristotle's rhetoric of Plato's own in reference to Homer (*Republic* 595c).

<sup>11</sup> As has been observed, Aristotle never names Plato in this discussion, speaking instead of 'those who introduced Forms' as 'friends of ours'. I assume in the present discussion that Plato is indeed his target, and not Speusippus or some other member or members of the Academy. For the question of Aristotle's intended target, see Hardie 1980, 47–8. For a less charitable reading of Aristotle, at least as regards the question of the fidelity of his ascription, see Grant: 'Anyhow, we cannot escape the conclusion that these arguments misrepresent the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, so far as we know it, and do not contain really valid grounds for its rejection' (1885 vol. I, 213).

So, a rueful Aristotle concludes, though orthogonal to his own dominant concerns and methods in ethics, puzzles pertaining to the universal good must be engaged even if doing so requires him to deride a thesis cherished by his dearest friends. Ultimately, Aristotle concludes that, even on the unlikely supposition that it exists, the universal good itself would prove utterly otiose: it would be of no practical use to any actual agent engaged in the activities of daily life (*EN* 1097a3–14). From this perspective, then, Stewart’s perplexity appears immediately unmotivated, even peculiar: Plato evidently accepts, while Aristotle plainly rejects, a single separated Form of Goodness which somehow implicates itself into our daily conduct.

It is thus striking and more than a bit disconcerting that Stewart’s perplexity might appear at once both well and ill motivated. So much already suggests that Aristotle’s anti-Platonism in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 is unclear in its motives and results; so too, consequently, are his own attitudes towards the existence and nature of the *summum bonum*.

To force the issue somewhat, one can easily juxtapose texts of Aristotle which, while certainly not contradictory, do seem to strain against one another. First is the passage in which Aristotle overtly rejects Plato’s conception of the good:

- The good is not ‘something common, universal, and one’ (*koinon ti katholou kai hen*, *EN* 1096a28).

Still, because, according to Aristotle, human action would ultimately be in vain were it not supported by a final good as its ultimate object:

- There is a highest, or best, good (*t’agathon kai to ariston*, *EN* 1094a18–22), namely, *eudaimonia*.

Again, although hardly contradictory, these two remarks may reasonably be thought to strain against one another: after all, if happiness is the highest good, then why is there not some good which is common, universal and one, some good, the highest good, which, as Aristotle says, is the cause of all other good things (*EN* 1002a2–4, 1095a26–28; *EE* 1218b7–11)?<sup>12</sup>

It is noteworthy that the difficulty generated by these sorts of questions—and so ultimately the difficulty generated from Aristotle’s treatment of Plato in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6—caught the attention of Aristotle’s readers long before it gave rise to Stewart’s discomfiture. This is noteworthy not least because these earlier expressions of perplexity help bring into sharper relief the precise character of a concern like Stewart’s. Which features, exactly, of the Platonic view does he imagine Aristotle to endorse? In this connection it is salutary to reflect upon a response to Aristotle’s discussion of Plato issuing from a much earlier period of Aristotelian commentary,

<sup>12</sup> ‘This would further seem to be so [that our best good is *eudaimonia*] because [*eudaimonia*] is a source, since the source is what we aim at in all of our actions; and we suppose the origin and cause of actions to be something divine and worthy of honour’ (*EN* 1002a2–4).

from Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Equally sensing some tension in Aristotle's constellation of views about his own good and Plato's, Aquinas maintains:

We must consider that Aristotle does not intend to reject the opinion insofar as Plato maintained a separated good on which all good would depend. In the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics*... Aristotle expressly mentions a good, separated from the universe, to which the whole universe is ordered as an army is ordered to the good of its general. He does reject the opinion insofar as Plato held that the separated good is an idea common to all goods. (*In Eth. Nic.* VI.79.34)

To Aquinas, at least, *eudaimonia* is *not* after all Aristotle's highest good, because there is some other higher good, *the* highest good, namely the good god of *Metaphysics* XII. Once again, however, there seems to be some residual tension in Aristotle's views, since, as Aquinas rightly implies, the god of *Metaphysics* XII is in many respects metaphysically akin to Plato's Form of the Good: each is a separated, perfectly good being, and indeed each is the very goodness upon which all other goods depend for their goodness (*EE* 1218b7–12). So, when Aristotle avers that there is no goodness *in itself* (*kath' hautō*), to Aquinas his reservation seems to come along with the tag '... of the sort that Plato envisaged'.

What sort was that? The offending feature, according to Aquinas, is *commonality*: the highest good is either not something predicable, or, if it is, it cannot be predicated in common, in some univocal way, across the full spectrum of all good things.<sup>14</sup> The question thus naturally arises: if the separated goodness accepted by both Plato and Aristotle is not, according to Aristotle, predicated in common of all good things, then what are the forms of goodness predicated of the good things of which goodness itself is not predicated? And what will be the relation of these various forms of goodness to goodness itself?

After all, as Aquinas plausibly represents them, both Plato and Aristotle envisage a separated highest good which is the source of goodness for all other good things, a source in the sense that the lesser goods qualify as goods precisely because they somehow depend for their goodness upon that highest good. Minimally, then, if Aquinas is right, one would like to know precisely how Aristotle acknowledges the existence of a fundamental goodness, a goodness upon which other goods depend for their goodness, and yet also decries Plato's commitment to the Form of the Good—which Form Plato, precisely like Aristotle, describes as the cause (*aitia*; *Republic* 508e3) of other good things in our universe, such as knowledge and truth.

<sup>13</sup> In our era, White 1981, 237–9 teases out some of the same connections, though he remains less committal on the precise role of the prime mover to Aristotle's metaphysics of goodness than does Aquinas.

<sup>14</sup> Compare Menn: 'Plato's mistake [scil. according to Aristotle] was not in positing a good itself, nor in making this separate, but in identifying it with the Idea of the good and not with the final cause' (1992, 549).

Plato and Aristotle come apart, according to Aquinas, only in the form of dependence presumed by each: Plato's form of dependence—participation—is assumed to guarantee univocity, whereas Aristotle's form of dependence—some broadly teleological dependence, judging by his illustrations—does not. Yet teleological dependence will not by itself guarantee non-univocity. On the contrary, to pick up on the very illustration of Aristotle's cited by Aquinas, if a platoon's goodness derives from the good of its general, will not goodness for them—the platoon and the general—be the same good, namely the goodness of victory? What, then, is the source of Aristotle's commitment to non-univocity? And what are its costs?

In their different ways, then, these commentators, from different periods of Aristotle's readership, locate unclarity and instabilities in his approach to the *summum bonum*. Their concerns, surely legitimate, recommend a reconsideration of the purport of his anti-Platonic arguments in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6, with a special focus on their ramifications for Aristotle's own conception of the *summum bonum*.

## II Further, Preciser Problems

The general concerns voiced by Stewart and Aquinas may be augmented by two more narrowly focused problems, the second of which in particular raises a consequential question about the texture of Aristotle's own positive view of the *summum bonum*. That is, if we grant him his dominant arguments against Plato, we are left with a question as to whether he can sustain all he himself wishes to say about his own highest good.

Both problems begin with a development of Aquinas' observation about commonality. As Aquinas fairly notes, when entering his objection in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6, Aristotle relies upon a typical anti-Platonic trope of his: he contends that goodness is *pollachôs legomenon*<sup>15</sup>—that it is 'meant in many ways'.<sup>16</sup> In advancing this kind of criticism, Aristotle sets his sights on a deeply rooted Platonic thesis, one expressible in terms of Plato's general *univocity assumption*, that every core philosophical notion admits of a single, non-disjunctive, essence-specifying account.<sup>17</sup> In the case at hand, if Plato is right and goodness is univocal, then it is manifestly not *pollachôs legomenon*; for the same reason, if Aristotle is right and it is *pollachôs legomenon*, then goodness is certainly nothing 'common, universal, and one' (*EN*

<sup>15</sup> More precisely, he says that the good is said in as many ways as being (*epei t'agathon isachôs legetai tô (i) onti*, *EN* 1096a23–4), and that being is said in many ways (*to de on legetai men pollachôs*, *Met.* 1003a33). Together these remarks entail that the good is said in many ways.

<sup>16</sup> See Shields 1999 for an account of Aristotle's approach to multivocity and homonymy. I there argue, and will here assume, that homonymy and multivocity are coextensive in Aristotle. In general, the current discussion accepts the framework of homonymy and multivocity established in Shields 1999, but is meant to supersede its assessment of the consequences of Aristotle's commitment to the multivocity of goodness.

<sup>17</sup> One especially clear instance of Plato's univocity assumption can be found at *Meno* 71d–72a. See Shields 2010 for an introduction to Plato's univocity assumption and Aristotle's attitude towards it.

1096a22–3; cf. 1096a11, b10, b15–16). Goodness will be, instead, somehow many, not common to all good things, and universal. We may then ask: *if* Aristotle is right that goodness is *pollachôs legomenon*, what are the consequences for his own conception of the *summum bonum*, of that good which he describes as the best good of all (EN 1094a18–22)?

In approaching this question, we encounter our first additional problem about Aristotle's view, which arises in connection with his understanding of dependence. If we focus on the highest good for human beings, *eudaimonia*, we find that Aristotle introduces it as a cause (*aitia*) of the goodness of other good things. Yet Aristotle elsewhere endorses a causal synonymy thesis, that necessarily,  $x$  causes  $y$  to be  $\phi$  only if  $x$  is itself  $\phi$  (*Gen. et Corr.* 323b33–34; *Met.* 1032b1–12, 1034a22–3, a26–7, 1074a4–5).<sup>18</sup> If that is so, then the goodness of happiness can cause the goodness of other forms of human goods only if they are good things in something approximating the same way. (In any formulation in which it has a chance of being true, the causal synonymy principle will not be satisfied by a visitor to the Pompidou Centre who is caused to be a bit blue by a viewing of Matisse's *Blue Nude II*.) So, if various human goods are good in sundry different ways, we may be left wondering why Aristotle is confident that *eudaimonia* is the sole and sufficient cause of other human goods. Heading in the opposite direction, since *eudaimonia* is the cause of other human goods, then it is not immediately easy to appreciate how the goodness of *eudaimonia* and its derivative human goods could fail to be univocally good.

Supposing, as seems possible,<sup>19</sup> that Aristotle sidesteps this first worry by abandoning or suitably constraining his thesis of causal synonymy,<sup>20</sup> it will nonetheless give way to a second, more consequential, and more disturbing worry. Aristotle endorses a *commensurability thesis* according to which  $x$  can be said to be value-commensurable with  $y$  as  $\phi$ —that  $x$  can be more or less  $\phi$  than  $y$ , or as  $\phi$  as  $y$  is—only if  $x$  and  $y$  are univocally  $\phi$  (*Top.* 107b13–17; cf. *Pol.* 1259b37).<sup>21</sup> Taken at face value,

<sup>18</sup> A typical sort of expression occurs in *Gen. et Corr.* 1.7: 'It is natural for body to be affected by body, flavour by flavour, colour by colour, and generally things that are of a given genus by other such things... [Further, it is] understandable that fire heats and cold things cool, and generally what is active makes the thing affected similar to itself' (323b33–4; cf. 324a10–11).

<sup>19</sup> Stated thus baldly, the causal synonymy thesis is plainly false: a murderer causes her victim to be dead without herself being dead. In fact, Aristotle refines and restricts the causal synonymy principle in various ways, so that it is not susceptible to such obvious counter-examples. For a clear presentation of the issues, including the relevant qualifications, see Bodnar 2009, §3. See also Mourelatos 1984, and especially Stein 2012.

<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting, however, that one sort of restriction which Aristotle does offer does not speak to the case of our present concern: artefacts, he says, are produced not by other actual artefacts, but by something which is potentially an artefact (*Met.* 1032b11–14, b21–3, 1034a21–2), where he seems to have in mind the form of the artefact as it pre-exists in the soul of the craftsman.

<sup>21</sup> The phrases *commensurable* and *comparable* have not received consistent uses in contemporary value theory. Some, including Raz 1986 and Anderson 1997, simply use them interchangeably. Properly speaking, values are incommensurable when they lack a common cardinal measure. Some, like Stocker 1990 and Chang 1997, prefer this stricter (and more appropriate, given its provenance) use of the term. On this stricter use, incommensurability plainly does not entail incomparability, as between either values or

this commitment precludes his regarding the various comparable goods he regards as non-univocally good; yet he seems perfectly prepared to order the various homonymous goods against one another. The question thus arises as to how Aristotle thinks he can embrace both non-univocity and commensurability.<sup>22</sup>

To elaborate, if we were to say that ‘her paring knife is sharp’ and that ‘the key of his third piano sonata is sharp’, we would have no grounds for suggesting that the knife was or was not sharper than the sonata. This is because the accounts of ‘sharp’ in these instances diverge, and thus satisfy Aristotle’s definition of homonymy, and we are assuming that homonymy and being *pollachôs legomenon* are coextensive:

Those things are called homonymous of which the name alone is common, but the account of being corresponding to the name is different . . . Those things are called synonymous of which the name is common, and the account of being corresponding to the name is the same. (*Cat.* 1a1–4, 6–7)<sup>23</sup>

Since the predicate *sharp* is *pollachôs legomenon* in our occurrences, we do not have a synonymous use of the predicate; hence, the predicate is not univocal across these applications. In this sort of case, one can appreciate Aristotle’s stricture: given that the applications are non-univocal, and given that commensurability requires

value bearers. Still, others, using the term in a more relaxed manner, call values incommensurable when they cannot be ranked ordinally. In the current chapter, I adopt the latter, less restrictive terminology. On this approach, when two values, or value bearers, cannot be ranked ordinally, they are *incommensurable*. This is mainly an expository convenience, but also intended to underscore the fact that one core question for us will concern how Aristotle is in a position to *order* or *rank* values or value bearers, which is to do more than merely compare them. Clearly Aristotle would have a much more significant problem if his values lacked ordinal rankings than if they merely lacked common cardinal measures.

Ultimately, most important for assessing Aristotle’s positive commitments in value theory is a further distinction between *strong* and *weak commensurability*. Weak commensurability asserts ordinality between *any two* domain-specific values, whereas strong commensurability requires a single measure for ordering *all* values, across all domains. Aristotle does not overtly distinguish strong from weak commensurability, but seems to accept strong commensurability in cases where he accepts commensurability at all. These more fine-grained questions raise some of the most difficult issues for our final assessment of Aristotle’s attitudes towards the *summum bonum*, but they take us beyond the confines of the current chapter, which seeks rather to lay out in a sympathetic manner some of the initial difficulties to which his rejection of Plato’s Form of the Good give rise with respect to his own approach to the *summum bonum*. I thank Ralf Bader for his helpful insights on this point.

<sup>22</sup> A similar concern has understandably arisen in some contemporary discussions of non-univocity in moral philosophy. Thus, Merli: ‘Moral philosophy presents us with a puzzle concerning the univocity of our predicates. In order to have genuine agreement or disagreement, speakers must share semantic common ground; without this, their disputes are merely verbal’ (2007, 297). For expressions of similar concerns, see also Hare 1952 and Horgan and Timmons 1992.

<sup>23</sup> So, according to Aristotle:

*x* and *y* are synonymously  $\phi$  if: (i) *x* is  $\phi$ ; (ii) *y* is  $\phi$ ; and (iii) the accounts (or definitions, *logoi*) corresponding to ‘ $\phi$ ’ in ‘*x* is  $\phi$ ’ and ‘*y* is  $\phi$ ’ are the same.

whereas:

*x* and *y* are homonymously  $\phi$  if: (i) *x* is  $\phi$ ; (ii) *y* is  $\phi$ ; and (iii) the accounts (or definitions, *logoi*) corresponding to ‘ $\phi$ ’ in ‘*x* is  $\phi$ ’ and ‘*y* is  $\phi$ ’ do not completely overlap.

See Shields 1999 for a comprehensive discussion of this distinction.

synonymy, we should expect the lack of commensurability we in fact observe. It makes no ready sense to compare a paring knife and a sonata in respect of sharpness (*Top.* 107b19–26), at least not in any literal, non-analogical manner. By contrast, when synonymy does obtain, comparison is immediately appropriate: one can certainly judge a razor to be sharper than a paring knife.

As applied to the more abstract case at hand then, if, as Aristotle contends, goodness is *pollachôs legomenon*, we should at the very least be alert to the possibility that we are afforded no guarantee of commensurability of good things in respect of their goodness. On the contrary, so far we should expect incommensurability. A Platonist will therefore be thoroughly justified in asking how, if Aristotle is right about the multivocity of goodness, he remains entitled to rank good things along some ordinal scale at the top of which sits his *summum bonum*.

This is all the more so because Aristotle makes free use of his apparatus of homonymy within *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6:

Which goods should one regard as goods in their own right (*kath' hauta*)? Those pursued even when considered individually, like intelligence, seeing, certain pleasures, and honours? For even if we pursue these because of something else, one would none the less regard them as goods in their own right. Or is nothing good in its own right beyond the Idea (*idea*) [sc. of the Good]? If the latter, the Form (*eidos*) [of the Good] will be futile. If the former, and these are counted as among things good in their own right, then the account of goodness (*to agathou logos*) in all of them will need to be shown to be the same, just as the account of whiteness is the same in snow and in white lead.<sup>24</sup> But the accounts of goodness as it belongs to honour, intelligence, and pleasure are different and divergent (*heteroi kai diapherontes*), precisely in the way in which they are good things. It is not the case, then, that the good is something common corresponding to a single Idea (*to agathon koinon ti kata mian idean*). (*EN* 1096b16–26)

We say that honour is good, indeed good in its own right (*kath' hauta*), and so too that intelligence and pleasure are good, and good in their own rights; but the accounts (*logoi*) of the predicate *good* as it applies to these subjects are different and divergent. According to the explicit formulation of homonymy given in the *Categories*, then, goodness is non-synonymous across this range. Evidently, then, when we say that these sorts of subjects are good, we are not in a position to compare them *as goods*. It will also follow, if this conclusion stands, that we are not in a position, according to Aristotle, to say that intelligence is better than pleasure; nor are we, finally, easily able to say that the life of intelligence is better than the life of pleasure. These are simply two different sorts of good lives, and they remain incomparable insofar as they are good. So far, then, Aristotle should not be in a position to rank them along a single standard with some *summum bonum* to which

<sup>24</sup> Aristotle uses as an example white lead (*psimuthion*), a sort of pigment mixed in make-up used to whiten the face, because its whiteness is indisputably the whiteness of snow. That is, the accounts (*logoi*) of *white* as it is predicated of snow and *psimuthion* will be precisely the same; hence, they are synonymously white.

they are inferior in respect of goodness. Yet this is something Aristotle evidently does want to maintain.<sup>25</sup>

### III A Deflationary Rejoinder

Our initial problems may seem overstated and readily deflated. Perhaps by attending to a simple distinction, either drawn by Aristotle or drawable on his behalf, these *prima facie* problems about causation and comparability may simply dissipate. We have in fact already implicitly touched upon several such distinctions, but have not yet made them explicit.

To begin, when we ask whether in his ethics Aristotle recognizes a *summum bonum* in terms of which lesser goods may be judged, we may be speaking of goodness in *personal* or *impersonal* terms.<sup>26</sup> That is, we may be asking either:

- Does Aristotle accept a single impersonal *highest good*? If so, what is its character?
- Does Aristotle accept a single *highest good-for-human-beings*? If so, what is its character?

Without either calling attention to his doing so, Stewart and Aquinas have each implicitly asked and answered one of these questions but not the other: Stewart assumes a personal conception of goodness, *eudaimonia*, as the good-for-human-beings; Aquinas by contrast adopts a notion of goodness as an impersonal good, namely Aristotle's good, as goodness *simpliciter*. On the personal conception, goodness is always goodness *for someone* or *for something* (in Aristotle's Greek: *to agathon tini*), whereas, on the impersonal conception, goodness is simply good, full stop (*to agathon haplôs*).

Given the clear difference between these conceptions of goodness, it becomes immediately necessary to divide the question of whether or not Aristotle embraces some single *summum bonum*. In view of this distinction, that is, those wondering about Aristotle's attitude towards the *summum bonum* might in fact be wondering: (i) does Aristotle accept an impersonal *summum bonum* (as he seems to do, e.g. at *EE* 1218b4–6); or (ii) does Aristotle accept a personal *summum bonum*

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle seems already to have been in the habit of making these sorts of comparisons by the time he wrote the *Protrepticus* (Iamblichus, *Prot.* 41.27–9, 43.25–7, 44.26–45.3).

<sup>26</sup> Kraut 2011 is alert to this distinction, and argues against the existence of an impersonal good in general and, more to the point in the current context, against any notion of an impersonal good as recognized by either Aristotle or Plato. For the purposes of the current chapter, I will assume without argument, contrary to Kraut and in keeping with Aquinas, that Aristotle recognizes a notion of an impersonal as well as a personal good, on the basis of such passages as *EN* 1113a20–4, 1129b3–6, 1152b26–7, 1155b24–6, 1157b26–8. These passages seem to contrast agent-relative goods with goodness *simpliciter*, which form of goodness, then, appears impersonal. Nothing, however, will turn on this assumption: if Kraut's contention were to prove correct, the main problems investigated in the current chapter would remain intact.

for-human-beings (or indeed a *summum bonum* for any other  $\phi$ , where  $\phi$  is a good-bearing kind)? Both? Neither? One but not the other?

Developing this distinction a bit, we see that Aristotle might in principle hold to a wide variety of what we might call *indexed goods* or even *indexed summa bona*,<sup>27</sup> one good, or highest good, for each kind  $\phi$ , where each kind  $\phi$  has its own proprietary good. The first deflationary response, then, is this: when he complains against Plato's conception of the good, Aristotle means only to assail the notion of a non-indexed, separated, or transcendent good and to replace it with some manner of indexed good, perhaps some variety of agent-relative or personal-goods, each of which is, so to speak, a local, kind-relative *summum bonum*, a highest-good-for- $\phi$ , but no more.<sup>28</sup> On this approach, what he decries is a non-indexed *summum bonum*; what he affirms, for each good-bearing kind  $\phi$ , is a highest-good-for- $\phi$ . This possibility is indeed made vivid by Aristotle's contention that the good for human beings is not the same as the good for other species of living beings, that, for instance, the good for humans is not the same as the good for fish (*EN* 1141a22–3; cf. *Met.* 1020b23–5).

This, then, might be thought a way to ease the tensions we have identified: when he criticizes Plato, Aristotle has in view a transcendent, impersonal, or generally non-indexed good, the Form of the Good, but when he speaks of the highest good at *EN* 1094a18–22, he implicitly intends only the highest-good-for-human-beings, or, in general, the highest-good-for- $\phi$ , for every kind of thing which has its own, presumably functionally determined good. There would be thus no reason to agree, for instance, with Stewart in thinking that Aristotle fails to recognize that he himself embraces the very conception of the *summum bonum* that he assails in Plato.<sup>29</sup> For he would not.

<sup>27</sup> I introduce a generic distinction *indexed vs non-indexed goods* as a convenience, since in fact various different distinctions are sometimes run together in discussions of Aristotle's conception of non-absolute good, including at least: (i) impersonal vs personal; (ii) agent-neutral vs agent-relative; (iii) sortal-independent vs sortal-dependent; (iv) kind-independent vs kind-dependent; (v) non-functional vs functional; (vi) predicative vs attributive. Fairly clearly some of these distinctions overlap, in the sense of being at least coextensive, but they might yet be differently explicated. Thus, for instance, if all kinds are functional kinds (iv) and (v) will be coextensive; but we do not know, merely by drawing these distinctions, whether all kinds are functional kinds. For now, we may treat these all, loosely, as a motley of *non-indexed vs indexed goods*, where all indexed goods must be indexed to some qualifying domain or predicate, whereas non-indexed goods are thought to be good *simpliciter*.

<sup>28</sup> Brüllmann 2011, 12 n. 6 contends on the basis of *EN* 1102a13–15 that the good outside Platonic contexts in *EN* I is always and without exception the best or highest good for human beings. This *may* be so; but it is not obviously so and, more to the point, is not shown to be so by *EN* 1102a13–15: it is consistent with the task of establishing the human good that the good characterized as the highest good is not only the human good—if that means the good *for humans* and for nothing else or for nothing at all.

<sup>29</sup> To be clear, however, Stewart himself does not move to resolve the tension he identifies in this way. In fact, it is incorrect to say that he regards himself as identifying a Platonic notion of the good at all, if this is understood as a view owing to Plato himself as opposed to being a broader Academic notion. On the contrary, Stewart answers his own perplexity about the alleged irrelevance of Aristotle's arguments to Plato's theory of the good in part by insisting that these arguments take as their target not Plato 'but the formalism of the Platonic school' (1892, 74).

Although cogent insofar as it draws a distinction pertinent to our understanding of Aristotle's approach to the *summum bonum*, this deflationary response is inadequate. To begin, even if we set aside Aquinas' focus on the unmoved mover, we find Aristotle regularly contrasting a personal or agent-relative form of goodness (*to agathon tini*) with a goodness he calls goodness *simpliciter* (*to agathon haplôs*), even within the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN* 1113a20–4, 1152b26–7, 1155b24–6, 1157b26–8; cf. *Pol.* 1292b2). So, there remains the question of what Aristotle supposes goodness *simpliciter* to consist in, and then also the question of how it differs from Plato's conception of the good itself, the Form of the Good—if, then, these are both to be construed as non-indexed goods. There will also then be a further question as to the relation between *the summum bonum*, *goodness simpliciter*, and the local, indexed *summa bona* here envisaged. 'What is achieved,' one scholar asks, 'by denying the existence of a universal Good, only to replace it with a universal good-for-man?'<sup>30</sup>

Second, and more importantly, even if we were to accept that Aristotle focuses exclusively in the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* on personal- or agent-relative goods,<sup>31</sup> or otherwise on some manner of indexed goods alone, the question of comparability would remain in force. Indeed, any such conclusion would only bring our problem about comparability into sharper relief. If goodness is non-univocal because every form of goodness is sortal-dependent or otherwise indexed, so that we have distinct accounts of goodness as it occurs in goodness-for- $\phi_1$ , goodness-for- $\phi_2$ , goodness-for- $\phi_3$ , . . . goodness-for- $\phi_n$ , then, again on the assumption that synonymy is necessary for comparability, these sundry goods could not be brought into comparison or ranked one against the other. In such a case, if asked whether the good-for-human-beings had anything in common with the good-for-peacocks, Aristotle would be constrained to deny that it does. As we have already seen, this he evidently does deny, when he insists that the good-for-humans is not the same as the good for other species of animals (*EN* 1141a22–3; cf. *Met.* 1020b23–5). This need not by itself be a crippling problem, of course. At any rate, it would be a worry were Aristotle not also disposed to make the judgement that the life of a being with a rational soul is somehow superior to the life of a being with a merely perceptual soul, or that the life of a being with a perceptual soul rates more highly than a life of a being with a nutritive soul alone, that it is better, in sum, to be a human being than to be a grub, and better to be a peacock than to be a bit of pond scum. Yet, some things he says evidently have just this purport (*EN* 1097b17–20, 1168b31–3, 1177b26–1178a3; *Met.* 982b28–983a11). So, the question re-emerges: if he decries Plato's univocity assumption even while contending that synonymy is necessary for commensurability, how are these sundry goods to be ordered?

<sup>30</sup> This question is reasonably put by Jacquette 1998, 319.

<sup>31</sup> See n. 27 above.

For these reasons, we do not satisfactorily address the evident tensions consequent upon Aristotle's anti-Platonism by restricting ourselves to these sorts of deflationary rejoinders. Even if we acknowledge a distinction between personal and impersonal forms of goodness, or between indexed and non-indexed forms more generally, we are left wondering precisely how Aristotle means to sidestep the problems for his own view which evidently accrue from his criticisms of Plato. So far, at any rate, we have not been given good reason for supposing that he has any grounds for doing so. Towards this end, it would be good to know at a minimum precisely what Aristotle supposes his anti-Platonic arguments in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 to establish.

#### IV Three Arguments from *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6

The question to be pursued in the current context, then, is not whether Aristotle's anti-Platonic arguments in fact succeed in undermining Plato's conception of goodness.<sup>32</sup> As interesting and as ultimately important as that question surely is, what matters in the present context is rather the question of what conception of goodness remains to Aristotle on the assumption that his arguments succeed. Although this latter question does speak indirectly to the posterior issue of the final purport of Aristotle's anti-Platonism, these questions are in fact distinguishable, and they should, in fact, be distinguished, since a consideration of the prior question allows us to articulate Aristotle's own approach to the *summum bonum* most clearly.

Unfortunately, it proves difficult to state with precision all of Aristotle's anti-Platonic arguments in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6. There is already a significant question as to their number and then also as to their relation to one another;<sup>33</sup> several of the arguments are highly compressed and all are enthymematic to at least some degree.

That acknowledged, the primary arguments of *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 are best divided and grouped as follows:

- I. an argument based upon the lack of Forms for items arranged in series (*EN* 1096a17–23);
- II. an argument based on the theory of categories (*EN* 1096a23–9; cf. *Top.* 107a3–17);
- III. an argument from the diversity of sciences (*EN* 1096a29–34);
- IV. two substantive but sub-argumentative cavils, mainly *ad hominem* and directed against express Academic commitments, which can usefully be regarded as highly compressed enthymematic arguments:

<sup>32</sup> There is, however, no reason to embrace the pre-emptory finding of Grant: 'Anyhow, we cannot escape the conclusion that these arguments misrepresent the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, so far as we know it, and do not contain really valid grounds for its rejection' (1885 vol. I, 213).

<sup>33</sup> For example, Stewart identifies four (1892 vol. I, 70); Grant identifies four (1885 vol. I, 208), though with only a partial overlap with Stewart's four; and Jacquette reconstructs and discusses seven (1998, 321).

- a. the first based on the Academic practice of distinguishing  $\phi$  things from something they call the  $\phi$ -itself (*autohekaston*) (EN 1096a34–1096b2),
- b. the second based on the Academic commitment to the sempiternity (*tô(i) aidion einai*) of the Forms (EN 1096b2–5);
- V. a dilemmic argument based on the Academic commitment to the existence of a plurality of intrinsic goods (EN 1096b8–26);
- VI. two arguments on the practical irrelevance of the Form of the Good:
  - a. the first urging its irrelevance as an end of human action (EN 1096b31–5);
  - b. and the second proceeding in two phases, evidently intended as a riposte to an imagined rejoinder to (VI. a), to the effect that the Form of the Good might serve as an end by serving as a regulative paradigm:
    - i. first, that sciences in fact proceed without any appeal to the Form of the Good (EN 1096b35–1097a8),
    - ii and finally, second, that they are right to do so, since gazing on a highly abstract Idea offers nothing regulative (a doctor has nothing to gain from gazing on the Good Itself; he focuses not on the universal good nor even on universal health, but rather on human health, and indeed *this* human's health (EN 1097a8–13)).

The arguments have shifting targets and employ varying strategies. Some are more and some less *ad hominem*;<sup>34</sup> and some rely more and others less on distinctively Aristotelian commitments.

However one individuates them, it seems reasonably clear that Aristotle deploys several arguments of a more metaphysical caste and several of a more practical orientation. For the present purposes, which pertain to Aristotle's own conception of the *summum bonum*, three are especially noteworthy: (i) the category-based argument (EN 1096a23–9); (ii) the argument from the plurality of science; and (iii) the dilemmic argument pertaining to intrinsic goods (EN 1096b8–26). These arguments serve to illustrate a striking point about the series of arguments in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6, that the arguments, intentionally or not, are arrayed progressively, establishing (assuming soundness) an ever more fine-grained conception of goodness. The end of the argument series thus leaves us with the question of whether Aristotle manages to fracture goodness to the point where he lacks any conception of the *summum bonum* sufficient to the task he sets for it.

*An Argument from the Categories.* According to Aristotle, 'goodness is meant in as many ways as being' (EN 1096a23–24). This conclusion derives, it seems from the bare categoricity of the categories, that is, from the fact that there are categories of beings, whether or not they are internally ordered in terms of priority and posteriority:

<sup>34</sup> In speaking of them as *ad hominem*, I do not mean to characterize them as fallacious. Rather, some arguments seek to turn Academic commitments against Academics, while others proceed based primarily upon Aristotelian commitments which the Academics might or might not be at liberty to deny.

Further, since the good is spoken of in as many ways as being—for [it is spoken of] in [the category] of what-it-is [i.e. substance], for example god and mind; in quality, the virtues; in quantity, a suitable amount; in relative, the useful; in time, the propitious; in place, a location; and in other [categories], other such things—it is clear that the good cannot be something universal, common [to all good things], and single. For if it were, it would not be spoken of in all the categories, but in one only. (*EN* 1096a23–9; cf. *Top.* 107a3; *Met.* V.7)

The argument roots the homonymy of goodness directly in Aristotle's doctrine of categories, contending, in fact, that goodness is predicated non-univocally across the entire range of them. Since they are ten, the accounts of the predicate *good* as it attaches to the discrete categories must, evidently, also be ten.

The argument has been variously interpreted.<sup>35</sup> Its basic outline is, however, perfectly clear:

- (1) There are ten categories of being (or, for that matter, there are  $n$  categories of being, where  $n > 1$ ).
- (2) If (1), there are irreducibly distinct kinds of beings.
- (3) So, there are irreducibly distinct kinds of beings.
- (4) It is possible to predicate goodness of items in these various categories. (One may say, that is, 'x in  $c_1$  is good' and 'y in  $c_2$  is good' and 'z in  $c_3$  is good' and so on for the  $n$  categories of being).
- (5) If goodness were univocal, it would not be possible to predicate goodness across the categories in this way. (For if goodness were something universal, common and single, 'it would not be spoken of in all the categories, but in one only'; *EN* 1096a28–9).
- (6) Hence, goodness is not univocal.

Obviously, the main question pertains to (5): why should this be so?

One point of contention with respect to (5) pertains to the function of the illustrations Aristotle offers in each of the categories. He says that in the category of substance, god and *nous* are said to be good, while in the category of quality, the virtues are good, in the category of time, the propitious is good, and so forth. The purport of these illustrations is a bit unclear, however. What do these (putative) facts about the various examples of goods across various categories actually show us, according to Aristotle?

To adapt some terminology from Geach,<sup>36</sup> we may regard Aristotle as beginning with the thought that when we use goodness attributively of items in different categories of being, we are not at liberty to suppose that there is a predicative use which is univocal and detachable from its attributive applications. On the contrary, he contends, so far from being at liberty to make this transformation, we are

<sup>35</sup> Shields 1999, 198–208 considers various formulations of this argument, and assesses their various claims to success. Especially noteworthy interpretations are Ackrill 1972 and MacDonald 1989.

<sup>36</sup> Geach 1956.

positively precluded from doing so by the doctrine of categories. That is, although we speak of a *good man*, a *good character trait*, a *good time*, and so forth, we are precluded from saying that men, character traits, and times are all good—if, that is, we had been supposing that the accounts of goodness attaching to the predicates across this range reflect univocity. For, according to Aristotle, they do not.

If this general understanding of the argument is correct, then the consequences of Aristotle's argument, irrespective of its ultimate plausibility, are surprising. He seems to argue, with Geach, that in a sense *good* is always attributive; but in Aristotle we find a peculiar sort of attribution, not merely a predicate-relative restriction (a good baker, or a good bungee cord), but a sort of bare categorial attribution. Geach says 'There is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad *so and so*' (1956, 65). Aristotle's 'so and so', the subjects to which goodness is attributed, derive immediately and exclusively from his doctrine of categories. Importantly, in this argument at least, Aristotle does not appeal even to functional considerations. He is here claiming not, for instance, that Socrates is a good human being just in case he fulfils the human function, but rather that the account of the predicate *good* as it applies to entities in the category of substance will differ from the account of that predicate as it applies to entities in other categories of being: being a good substance is not at all the same thing as being a good quality or quantity. In that sense, each time it is predicated, the predicate good carries with it the standards of goodness dictated by the category to which the subject of its predication belongs. The attributive content of goodness is here, then, categorially rather than functionally determined and delimited.

In seeking to establish this result, the argument takes the form of a standard Aristotelian argument for non-univocity: (1) the accounts of the predicate  $\phi$  as it applies to instances  $a_1 \dots a_n$  are distinct; (2) if (1), then  $\phi$  is homonymous across these applications; so,  $\phi$  is homonymous across these applications. In this case, the predicate  $\phi$  is *good* and the instances  $a_1 \dots a_n$  are items drawn from diverse categories of being. Again, since there are ten categories of being, there will be ten accounts of the predicate good. This is why Aristotle concludes that 'goodness is meant in as many ways as being' (*t'agathon isachôs legetai tô(i) onti*, EN 1096a23–4; cf. EE 1217b25–7).

If we wish to keep count, there are, according to Aristotle then, at least ten different accounts of goodness. Indeed, one might expect that in terms of the formula provided there should be *precisely* ten (*isachôs*).<sup>37</sup> For this reason, the point that this argument makes no appeal to a functional notion of goodness proves noteworthy. If, for

<sup>37</sup> Perhaps, though, Aristotle means only 'as many as' in the sense of 'at least as many as', as he seems to mean in a parallel passage *Met.* 1013a16 (cf. *Met.* 1054a14, where matters are less clear). It is a bit difficult to say, however, since the adverb *isachôs*, which ought to mean *equally as many as*, seems to be an Aristotelian neologism, and is used in antiquity, with one exception, exclusively either by Aristotle or by Aristotelian commentators commenting on Aristotle. The exception is a fifth-century Neoplatonist commentator commenting on Plato, Hermias, in *Platonis Phaedrum scholia*, 170.14.

instance, we were to find congenial Aristotle's suggestion that the good-for-man is distinct from the good-for-fish (*EN* 1141a22–3; cf. *Met.* 1020b23–5), and so on for all other species, then we would perforce be relying on some distinct, extra-categorical consideration, presumably some broadly functional notion. For fishes no less than humans and god belong to the category of substance. We would also evidently be jettisoning any claim to the effect that being and goodness march in step, that goodness and being display precisely the same categorially driven account diversity. Rather, goodness would begin to outstrip being rather rapidly, since items within a single category would also prove to be homonymously good.

*An Argument from the Diversity of Sciences.* This possibility becomes salient even within *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6, as the second argument to be considered makes clear. This is the argument from the diversity of sciences. Aristotle argues:

Further, when many things correspond to a single idea there is also a single Idea for them; so, there should also be a single science (*mia tis epistêmê*) of all good things. In fact, however, as things are, there are many sciences of good things even under a single category, for instance, the science of the propitious in war is generalship whereas the science of the propitious in sickness is medicine, while the science dealing with moderation in the case of food is medicine whereas the science dealing with moderation as regards what is injurious is gymnastics. (*EN* 1096a29–34)

This argument self-consciously extends the ways things may be thought to be good beyond those already generated by the doctrine of categories. For Aristotle now also contends that even subordinate to individual categories there are different ways of being good.

For instance, even within the category of time, we say that the propitious (*kairos*) is good, but then observe further that the propitious in war consists in a time's being the right moment to attack, whereas the propitious in medicine consists in a time's being the right moment to initiate a given treatment. So, even within the category of time *propitious* is homonymous. Aristotle seems to have in mind here the sort of homonymy he elsewhere characterizes as especially difficult to notice. In cases of such nuance, Aristotle claims, 'homonymy creeps in unnoticed' (*Top.* 107b6), because one homonymous term is nested within another. Here, *good* is homonymous, because in some applications it means *virtuous* and in others it means *propitious* (*kairos*), but upon closer inspection, we find that *propitious* too is homonymous, since sometimes it means *advantageous*, and other times it means simply *suitable*. Presumably, the nested homonymy is transitive, so that we find the ways of being good multiplying with each iteration.

If this argument is cogent, it follows that so far from being predicated in exactly as many ways as there are categories of being, good is multiply, subtly homonymous, in intra-categorical ways.

*An Argument from the Diversity of Intrinsic Goods.* There is, however, still more texture to goodness. At one juncture in the chapter, Aristotle pauses to consider an

Academic rejoinder concerning all and only intrinsic goods. The purport of the rejoinder is that there is a single Form, in effect, only for intrinsic goods (*ta kath' hauta agatha*), and that all such goods are univocally good (*EN* 1096b8–16). All such things qualify as univocally good because they are all such as to be pursued and loved for themselves or in their own right (*ta kath' hauta diôkomena kai agapômena*, *EN* 1096b10–11). It is doubtful that Aristotle is putting into the mouths of his imagined Academic detractors the suggestion that *being loved and pursued for themselves* is supposed in some manner to qualify as an account of goodness. Rather, he imagines them as narrowing the field so as to capture what sort of thing the Idea of Goodness might be understood to be. It is in response to this rejoinder that Aristotle urges still greater multiplicity. Even here, within the domain of intrinsic goods, he contends, we uncover still more fine-grained homonymy.

His response takes the form of a dilemmic argument (*EN* 1096b8–26),<sup>38</sup> which will be the third and final argument from the chapter we will consider. In response to the rejoinder he offers them, Aristotle now urges that the Academicians must make a choice. Either the Form of the Good alone will be intrinsically good, or other, more quotidian states and activities will be so as well, perhaps sight, certain pleasures, honours, and intelligence. If it is to be the Form of the Good alone, then, according to Aristotle, the postulation of this Form will prove futile (*mataion*), presumably because it will be explanatorily idle: no appeal to this Form will play a role in any explanation of any actual agent's occurrent intentions. If, on the other hand, we allow that the good things we actually pursue—certain pleasures, honours, intelligence—qualify as intrinsic goods, then we face still more multivocality. For, the 'accounts of goodness as it belongs to honour, intelligence, and pleasure are different and divergent, precisely in the way in which they are good things' (*EN* 1096b23–5). It is important to stress here that Aristotle is not merely saying that honour, intelligence, and pleasures are different sorts of things with different sorts of accounts; for undoubtedly they are and no Academician would have the slightest reason to deny that. Rather, insists Aristotle, these different good things differ precisely insofar as they are good; so, the accounts of goodness across these applications diverge; hence, goodness is homonymous across this range. It follows, Aristotle concludes, that even within the range of intrinsic goods, 'it is not the case, then, that the good is something common corresponding to a single Idea' (*EN* 1096b25–6).

Without pursuing the question of the ultimate success or failure of this argument, it serves to reflect briefly on its dialectical context. Aristotle has been pursuing a line of arguments in an attempt to establish the non-univocity of goodness. His intended target, Plato or some other group of Academics, are offered a chance to respond. They counter that only intrinsic goods are univocally good. In one horn of his dilemmic counter-response, Aristotle retorts that goodness is multivocal even as it

<sup>38</sup> This passage is quoted in full in section II.

applies to sundry intrinsic goods. The reason? The accounts of goodness across these cases are 'different and divergent' (*heteroi kai diapherontes*, EN 1096b24). Here, however, the Academic might well demure. Without giving any further content to the judgement, the Academic might then simply say: 'No, they're not.' For presumably the Platonist will want to insist that these sundry intrinsic goods are good just because they participate in the Form of the Good.

The dialectic will devolve into a sterile stalemate unless one side or the other can offer further grounds for supposing that the accounts of goodness across this range either do or do not diverge. In fact Aristotle offers a whole series of tests for homonymy in *Topics* I.15,<sup>39</sup> though none of them seems immediately able to break the stalemate. (They include such matters as intersubstitutivity of paraphrase and a test of contraries. For instance, since *flat* is contrary to *sharp* in the case of a musical key, while in the case of a knife *dull* is the contrary, it follows that *sharp* is multivocal in these applications. We find no such ready remedies in the case of *good*.) Consequently, if he is to more than gainsay his opponent in offering the response to the Platonic rejoinder that he does, Aristotle will need to advert to some further homonymy indicator. Importantly, in this connection, no easy appeal to the categories will suffice, since we are now looking for fine-grainedness well below the level of the categories. How is Aristotle to move this argument forward?

In fact, he makes no further argument whatsoever in this chapter, but merely issues a claim. In the present context, however, we need not assess his prospects of success. For we are more interested in the results of his anti-Platonic arguments on the assumption that they are sound than in the final question of their soundness. The results in this case are striking. Aristotle simply generates a list of intrinsic goods and contends that the account of goodness that attaches to each differs from the account of goodness that attaches to every other. Evidently, then, his point is really quite general: for any intrinsic good  $i_1$  the account of goodness attaching to  $i_1$  differs from the account of goodness attaching to  $i_2 \dots i_n$ . On the assumption, then, that the examples generalize,<sup>40</sup> homonymy across the range of intrinsic goods will be unconstrained. Not only is goodness non-univocal, it is unrestrictedly homonymous. For any intrinsic good  $i_n$ , its goodness will be, so to speak,  $i_n$ -good, which goodness will differ in account from the goodness of any other intrinsic good,  $i_{n^*}$ -good, since its goodness in turn will be not  $i_n$ -good but  $i_{n^*}$ -good. There will be *no* good which is a genus or determinable of which  $i_n$ -good and  $i_{n^*}$ -good are species or determinants.

<sup>39</sup> Shields 1999, ch. 2 recounts and reviews these tests.

<sup>40</sup> I thank Joachim Aufderheide for the observation that in fact Aristotle comments only on a limited range of intrinsic goods, not randomly selected in fact, but rather the sorts of goods which play a special role in the ethical theory under development. One should note in response, however, that either the point is general across intrinsic goods or it is not; if so, then we have unconstrained multivocality. If not, then Aristotle, or one of his supporters, will need to generate some principle which requires the intrinsic goods mentioned to have 'different and divergent' (EN 1096b24) accounts of goodness pursuant to them while precluding this in other cases. It is, however, difficult to see what this principle might be.

It follows, then, that the number of discrete kinds of goodness far outstrips the more manageable number which we have already encountered as generated by the theory of categories, whether generated inter- or intra-categorially, and again whether generated by priority and posteriority relations between the categories or, as Aristotle also contends, by bare categoricity itself.

Now, for better or worse, the kinds of goodness seem to be multiplying unconstrainedly. At any rate, we seem saddled with this result if Aristotle's final anti-Platonic argument is sound: in addition to inter-categorial and intra-categorial homonymy, we have a diversity of forms of goodness corresponding to every intrinsic good whatsoever.

## V The Commensurability of Good Things as Good

In the midst of his polemical discussion of Plato's conception of goodness, Aristotle offers a seemingly moment of self-criticism as well, when he wonders aloud how—if his anti-Platonic criticisms are correct—he should himself construe goodness in general. After noting that the various intrinsically good things have different accounts precisely insofar as they are good, and so are homonymous, he asks:

But how, then, is the good to be spoken of? For they surely [good things] do not seem to be homonymous simply by chance (*apo tuchês*). Are they, then, homonymous by being derived from a single source, by its being the case that all good things contribute to some single thing? Or is it rather that good things are analogically good (*ê mallon kat' analogian*)? For as sight is [something good] in the body, so reason is [something good] in the soul, and thus another thing [will be something good] in something else. Presumably, though, we should leave these matters for the present, since they would be more appropriately treated with requisite precision in another branch of philosophy. And the same holds for the Idea of the Good. (*EN* 1096b26–32)

Aristotle quite reasonably shows himself uncomfortable with the suggestion that *good* as it applies to violinists and lawyers is not a mere quirk of language; *good* is not like *sharp* as it applies to sonatas and thumbtacks. Still, given that Platonic univocity is no longer in play as a viable alternative, what may we say, he wonders, about the relation between the sundry things we call good? There is, after all, no single, common, and universal goodness. How, then, may we compare them insofar as they are good?

Aristotle does not answer this question in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6. In speaking of a more precise (or accurate, *exakriboun*) home for this topic of inquiry, Aristotle signals that straying too far into the metaphysics of morality in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 would be peripheral to the task at hand, namely that of determining the good life for human beings, and by doing so in such a way that yields precepts implementable by ordinary virtuous humans (cf. *EN* 1094b11–1095a9). This is presumably why he

in fact does not answer it directly anywhere at all in either the *Nicomachean* or *Eudemian Ethics*.

Even so, it is entirely appropriate that Aristotle should evince some awareness of the question of comparability even within the context of his ethical investigations. For once he dispatches the univocity of goodness, Aristotle risks depriving himself of the ability to compare good things with one another in respect of their goodness. Indeed, in the *Topics* he enunciates a principle which seems to have just this purport:

Further, we should observe at the same time whether terms are meant so as to admit of a more [or less] or so as to be used similarly, for instance in the cases of loud voices and loud garments,<sup>41</sup> or sharp flavours and sharp sounds. For neither of these is said to be loud or sharp in the same way and neither admits of a more [or less]. Accordingly, loud and sharp are homonymous. And neither admits of a more [or less]. For all synonyms are commensurable (*sumblêton*), since they will be meant so as to admit of a more [or less] or will be used similarly. (*Top.* 107b13–17)

Since all synonyms are commensurable, and in the context being homonymous is introduced as being sufficient for both non-synonymy and non-commensurability, two predicates will be commensurable if and only if they are synonymous (cf. *Met.* 1055a6–7; *Pol.* 1284a6).

Aristotle reinforces this same point in the *Physics*:

Whatever is not synonymous is, in every instance, incommensurable (*all' hosa mê sunônuma, pant' asumblêta*). For example, why is it that no pen, wine, or musical scale is sharper than any one of the others? It is because whatever is homonymous is incomparable (*hoti homônuma, ou sumblêta*). (*Phys.* 248b7–9)

Taking these observations all together then, Aristotle introduces synonymy as a condition of commensurability (COM):

- COM: The predicate  $\phi$  as it occurs in ' $a$  is  $\phi$ ' and ' $b$  is  $\phi$ ' is commensurable in terms of  $\phi$ -ness if, and only if,  $\phi$  is synonymous in these applications.<sup>42</sup>

If (COM) holds, then since according to Aristotle's several anti-Platonic arguments in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 goodness is homonymous across a very broad range of its applications, the subjects of these predications will not be comparable in respect of their goodness.

In response to this threat, it is natural to draw attention to Aristotle's suggestion in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 that all good things might be compared by analogy. Indeed,

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle's illustration is difficult to capture in directly parallel English. He is speaking of the homonymy of *leukos*, which, as applied to voices means *clear* or *distinct*, whereas applied to garments it means *bright* or *white*.

<sup>42</sup> I say 'commensurable in terms of  $\phi$ -ness' since two things might be non-synonymously  $\phi$  while being commensurably  $\psi$ . For example, perhaps no pen is sharper than any wine, though the wine is heavier than the pen. In general, judgements of synonymy and homonymy are always predicate relative (see Shields 1999, 11, 14, and 126).

when Aristotle offers core-dependent homonymy and analogy as two possible routes to comparability, it is often suggested that he plainly prefers the second alternative, that good things are good things by analogy.<sup>43</sup> This *may* be so, though Aristotle does not say that it is so in the *Nicomachean Ethics* or *Eudemian Ethics*.<sup>44</sup> Still, we do find him making use of what appears to be analogical reasoning in both works when pursuing his own account of the human good, in the context of his function argument, only a few pages after his extended criticism of Platonism. Indeed, he does so in a way reminiscent of his anti-Platonic arguments, because he endorses the thought that *just as* the good as regards a flute player resides in the player's realizing the characteristic end of that activity, *so also* the good of a human being will reside in the characteristic activity of being human, whatever that may be (*EN* 1097b22–8). This suggests an easy rejoinder to (COM), one to which Aristotle is plainly attracted:<sup>45</sup> *a* and *b* may be compared as good things even though the predicate good is homonymous to the degree that relative to their frameworks of appraisal, *a* and *b* are good in some analogous ways.

The rejoinder, which would implicate Aristotle in rejecting (COM), is, however, not so very easy. To begin, the point about analogy finds its easiest development in a broadly functional or teleological context. One might say, for example, that it makes no ready sense to regard this virtuous woman as better than that sharp knife, even though they are both goods of their kind. Still, one might reasonably say that this particular knife, though sharp, is not as far along the scale of knife-ish goodness as that woman is along the scale of human goodness. She is very highly adept at rational contemplation, which provides a scale of human goodness (let us allow), while the knife is barely able to cut, so dull is it. When so speaking, however, does one not risk reintroducing higher-order synonymy? That is, whatever its various merits or demerits, this seems a perfectly univocal account of goodness:

- *x* is good =<sub>df</sub> (i) *x* is a member of functional kind *K*; and (ii) *x* realizes the function of *K* to a high degree.

It is not clear, for instance, why Plato should be constrained to deny this; but, as we have seen, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 has as its primary goal the rejection of Plato's commitment to the univocity of goodness. Oddly, moreover, if this were Aristotle's point, then he could simultaneously endorse (COM) and the comparability of goodness; for goodness would turn out to be synonymous after all.

<sup>43</sup> So, e.g. Stewart: 'This is Aristotle's final answer: Different things are called *agatha* on the ground of identical relations (*analogia* is defined in *EN* v 3. 9 as *isotês logôn*). Thus the relation in which sight stands to the body is the same as that in which reason stands to the soul. If sight is "good" in its relation—i.e. it contributes to its particular end, the welfare of the body, reason is "good" in its relation to the welfare of the soul' (1892, 77).

<sup>44</sup> Mirus accepts this observation, but then proceeds, without warrant, to contend: 'In fact, it would seem that both homonymy *pros hen* and analogy are at work in the predication of "good"' (2004, 534–5).

<sup>45</sup> Indeed, in the *Politics* Aristotle develops just this thought, and even asserts baldly: 'According to the same argument, all good things may be comparable' (*Pol.* 1283a3–4).

To emphasize this point, we may compare Aristotle's situation with respect to functionally grounded analogy and univocity to a less controversial case. If we say that various stuffs are *poisonous* because to be a poison is to be such as to cause grievous bodily harm or death by ingestion, then we can happily admit that *poison* is synonymous across the range of its applications. We would presumably in this case have no difficulty in saying that some poisons are more poisonous than others, that, for instance, botulinum is the deadliest poison known to man, or that anthrax is more poisonous than strychnine, though the first of these causes death by shutting down the nervous system, the second by inducing respiratory failure, and the last by engendering systemic exhaustion brought on by muscular collapse. This is because we accept *poison* as univocal across these applications; and when we do we have no scruples about (COM). We simply assume that *poison*, though second order, is synonymous across this range of applications. This is because poison is a causal kind. In this connection, it bears re-emphasizing that according to Aristotle no less than Plato the human good is a cause of all other subordinate goods (*archên de kai aition tôn agathôn*, EN 1102a3–4). So, why, if he has implicitly embraced comparability of good things as rooted in a doctrine of analogy explicated in terms of some notion of functional realization, does Aristotle not similarly accept the very univocity he has assailed?

Again, the point of this line of exploration is not to offer some measure of adjudication in the dispute initiated by the anti-Academic attacks of *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6, but rather to try to come to terms with the notion of the *summum bonum* left to Aristotle on the assumption that this polemic succeeds. So far, it seems, that in order to maintain everything he has wanted to maintain about goodness, Aristotle will be constrained to advert to some notion of analogical goodness. When he does so, however, he also risks abandoning a crucial feature of his anti-Platonism. There thus threatens some self-generated instability in any account of the *summum bonum* he might yet wish to adopt.

Moreover, matters are still more complicated for him than even so much would suggest. For the doctrine of analogical goodness has been articulated only within the context of a broader teleological framework. We have seen, however, that the arguments of *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6, if sound, take us well beyond that framework. They force us into a context of non-univocity far outstripping even a broadly functional framework. According to those arguments, there is no univocal notion of goodness for: (i) items in different categories of being; (ii) entities studied by different sciences; and finally (iii) any intrinsic goods whatsoever. Arguments of the sort deployed in (i), (ii), and (iii) yield multivocity well beyond anything recognizably functional. A good quality is never good as a quantity or a relative is good. Even among qualities, no two intrinsic goods are good in the same manner. No substance, as prior to every relative, can be good in the way that the relative is good. These kinds are not, however, functional kinds: a relative is a category of being, but unlike a

human being or a computer, relatives, as relatives, have no function (e.g. the half, Aristotle's example of a relative being, has no function).

Consequently, since the arguments of *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 generate non-univocity even in these sorts of cases, any appeal to analogy for them will need to be grounded in some other, non-functional manner. So, Aristotle is not really in a position to proceed analogically against the backdrop of his broader teleology. One result, or seeming result, will be that his grounding of any alleged analogy of non-functional forms of goodness will be so thin as to be vacuous. For example, if the arguments offered to the effect that no two different kinds of intrinsic goods are good in the same way, then, on the assumption of (COM), intelligence and pleasure will not be immediately comparable. Perhaps, then, they are analogically good. What, though, will be the basis of the analogy? In the case of functional goods, the following framework commends itself: as *a* is good relative to the function of kind  $K_1$ , so *b* is good relative to the function of kind  $K_2$ , so that if *a* is further along the path towards realizing the function of  $K_1$  than *b* is along its path towards realizing the function of  $K_2$ , then we may say that *a* is better than *b*, or at least that *a* is a better  $K_1$  than *b* is a  $K_2$ . Unless pleasure proves to be a functional kind, then this framework will have no purchase. Same again for other intrinsic goods like courage, honour, and munificence.

The worry heading in this direction, then, is that any putative analogies of goodness threaten to be utterly ungrounded. It is thus especially difficult to understand why Aristotle thinks that by deploying analogical reasoning, 'all good things would be comparable to all good things' (*Pol.* 1283a3–4). So far, we have not been given cause for optimism on this score.

Taking that altogether, then, either analogies are grounded in functional kinds or they are not. If they are, then the non-univocity of goodness far outstrips the available analogies of goodness, with the result that (COM) requires that many recognized goods be incommensurable as goods. If, by contrast, all recognized goods are not so grounded, then it remains unclear how the analogies are to be more than vacuous. For, in this case, we have no ready framework for grounding them, and further no reason to simply believe in advance that contentful analogies can be produced. In that case, there will be little reason to suppose that good things will prove to be comparable, as goods.<sup>46</sup>

This last possibility need not by itself be crippling, of course. Still, one is inclined to ask: is the good-for-humans better than the good-for-fish? Are the two even commensurable? Can we compare one species to another from the standpoint of goodness? Note that this is *not* the question of whether one man might be a better human

<sup>46</sup> This result is embraced by Von Wright: 'The unity in the variety [of goodness] . . . is not that which a genus gives to the species falling under it. Nor does it appear to be a unity of the sort for which analogy or family resemblance can be held responsible . . . The meaning pattern of "good" is peculiar and puzzling. It is worth more attention than it has received on the part of philosophical semanticists' (1963, 17).

than some fish is a fish, but rather the question of whether one functional kind *K* is better than another. This is a question one might reasonably ask: should one prefer, if given the choice, to be a human or a grub? Or a graceful gazelle rather than a wretched despot? These sorts of questions seem at least meaningful; they seem, for instance, to be asked and answered in Plato's Myth of Er in *Republic X*.

So too does such a question arise for Aristotle's ethics. For instance, he seems plainly committed to comparability of the intellectual life characterized in *Nicomachean Ethics X* as something preferable in comparison with the life of practical virtue discussed in much of the rest of the work. For he expressly judges the life of theoretical virtue to be superior to the life of practical virtue (*EN* 1178a9–10). Yet, taken at face value, his constellation of commitments precludes his saying that the forms of goodness manifested by practical and intellectual virtues are commensurable; for *good* is non-synonymous across these applications.

It is noteworthy in this connection that Aristotle uses just one word (*sumblêton*) where some have been inclined to speak differently of *comparability* in distinction to *commensurability*.<sup>47</sup> This may be due to his accepting a bridge thesis, plausible to many but denied by others, to the effect that two bearers of value are comparable in terms of the values they realize if, and only if, those values are commensurable. Or, it may simply be that he has not distinguished comparability and commensurability in the manner of some later philosophers and economists. In either case, however, one would like to have from Aristotle something more regarding the comparability of good things, as good things. When subjected to the standards of comparability generated by his commitment to (COM), the thesis that only synonymous  $\phi$ s are comparable as  $\phi$ s, his anti-Platonic arguments, which take as their target precisely Plato's univocity assumption, threaten to rob him of the ability to effect the practices of comparison in which he engages.

To be clear, the contention here is not that Aristotle's anti-Platonic arguments fail, nor even that their success would be incompatible with his articulating some workable conception of the highest good. Rather, given his own frequent appeal to a highest good, indexed or non-indexed, he owes an account of the forms of orderings his own *summum bonum* affords, while acknowledging at the same time those forms it precludes. This account must, moreover, be such as to be fully consistent with the purport of his assault on Platonic moral metaphysics; for, were it not, piety would propel the Platonist to return in kind a version of the criticisms Aristotle has felt it necessary to mount against him.

## VI Conclusion

Aristotle speaks freely of one instance of goodness as the highest good (*t'agathon kai to ariston*, *EN* 1094a18–23). He insists that this good is unified (1094a18–23); that it

<sup>47</sup> See n. 21 above.

is superordinate to all lower goods (1094a1–22, 1097a25–34, 1097b6–16); that it is in fact the cause (*to aition*) and source of the goodness of all such subordinate goods (EN 1102a2–4, 1095a26–8; EE 1218b7–11). Ultimately, he contends, were it not for the existence of this highest good, all intentional action would be empty and futile (EN 1094a20–1). So far, then, he does not sound so very far away from Plato, who describes his own Form of the Good as the greatest thing to be learnt (*Rep.* 504e4–5, 505a2), as the cause (*aitia*) of the goodness of other good things (*Rep.* 508e3), and as the ultimate object of all human action. It is, after all, Plato, and not Aristotle, who says, ‘Every soul pursues the good and does all that it does for its sake’ (*Rep.* 505d11–e1).

It is therefore understandable that Aristotle’s anti-Platonic polemic in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 has occasioned consternation of different forms in different periods of Aristotelian scholarship. What is striking is not the existence of such consternation, but rather the divergence in response offered in the face of it. As we have seen, one tradition supposes that Aristotle is not in fact concerned with Plato at all, but with other, lesser Academics, or with a sort of gestalt Academic view which owes to everyone in general but to no one in particular. Others understand him as targeting Plato, but as badly misunderstanding Plato’s views, or, worse, as understanding Plato perfectly but as attacking him captiously with overweening rhetoric deployed to obscure his jejune argumentation. Still others think, in a more philosophically engaged and alert manner, that Aristotle accepts Plato’s dominant teaching about the good, but objects to certain detachable features of Platonic metaphysics. Even within this latter camp, however, divergence and disarray reign. Some suppose that it is Plato’s separation of the Form of the Good that rankles Aristotle; others locate his dissatisfaction in a presumed failure to grasp the teleological character of the *summum bonum*; and still others, including Aquinas, noting Aristotle’s own postulation of a separated but perfectly good god in *Metaphysics* XII as a final cause of human action, look elsewhere for differentiation, finding finally his principal anti-Platonic impetus in his aversion to Plato’s univocity assumption.

As far as the actual arguments of *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 are concerned, it is clear that this last group of scholars is nearest the mark. Although these arguments do lodge various complaints against the impracticality and unimplementability of the Form of the Good as Plato conceives of it, the meatiest among them are rather straightforward assaults on Plato’s univocity assumption. After deploying a series of categorial and non-categorially motivated arguments for the homonymy of the good, Aristotle concludes that the good cannot be something common, universal, and one (*koinon ti katholou kai hen*, EN 1096a28).

The question thus lies near as to how Aristotle conceives his own *summum bonum*. We know what it is not: it is not something common, universal, and one. What is less clear is what remains. In trying to determine its positive character, we have encountered a jumble of distinctions coursing through Aristotle’s various characterizations: between personal and impersonal goods, or attributive and predicative goods, or indexed and non-indexed goods more generally; between intrinsic and non-intrinsic

goods; between functional and non-functional goods; between first- and second-order goods; between commensurable and incommensurable goods; and between, finally, things good univocally and things good only homonymously.

These various distinctions sometimes overlap and sometimes not. Corporately, they make it difficult to develop a crisp understanding of Aristotle's final conception of the *summum bonum*—even, indeed, of whether he thinks that there is some *one summum bonum*, as opposed to several *summa bona*, each indexed in a sortally relative way to some limited domain. Here, then, a fertile tension in Aristotle's approach to the *summum bonum* emerges. If he thinks, in the end, as Aquinas at one point contends, that there is one *summum bonum*, non-indexed and superordinate to all others goods as their source and cause (*archê kai aition*), then his view does seem to approach the very Platonic theory he so harshly criticizes, thus giving rise to some version of the worry voiced by Stewart with which we began. If, by contrast, we are to understand him as setting aside the notion of a single, overarching *summum bonum* in favour of some perhaps indefinitely large range of *summa bona*, each indexed to a predicate or kind, then, given his conceptions of synonymy and commensurability, we are left with the challenge of determining how these various goods are to be brought into ordered comparisons, whether partial or complete.

If goodness is homonymous, and commensurability requires synonymy, as he himself says it does, then Aristotle's anti-Platonism will not be cost-free to him. On the contrary, although many of his anti-Platonic arguments resonate with present-day readers, Aristotle faces a problem of his own making: a serious commitment to the homonymy of the good threatens genuine incommensurability among those very values Aristotle seems otherwise disposed to bring into ordinal rankings.<sup>48</sup> His commitment to the *summum bonum*, then, understood even locally as an indexed highest-good-for-human-beings, recommends serious reflection on the prospects for commensurability in a homonymous value world. Without such further reflection, Aristotle's *summum bonum* threatens to fracture into so many scattered shards, each of which glistens under Plato's sun, but none of which glistens any more or any less than any other.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> It is perhaps noteworthy in this connection that in his own philosophy, broadly Aristotelian though it is, Aquinas, who shows himself fully alert to the tensions we have been developing (section I above), retreats from the equivocity of goodness: 'Since actions receive their species from their ends they must receive their species from their ultimate end, which is common, just as natural things are placed into a genus in accordance with a common character. Since, then, all things that can be desired by the will, insofar as they are such, *belong to one genus*, it is necessary for the ultimate end to be one. And this is especially so because in every genus there is one first principle, and the ultimate end has the character of a first principle' (*Summa Theologiae* I. 2 q. 1 ad 5).

<sup>49</sup> An ancestor of two sections of this chapter was presented at a conference on Kant and Aristotle on the Highest Good, held in St Andrews in 2010. I thank the organizers of that conference, Ralf Bader and Joachim Aufderheide, together with its other participants, for their questions and critical discussion. I additionally thank the organizers for their subsequent philosophical and editorial guidance. The conference introduced me to a range of issues which have come to have a long, productive afterlife. As a result, developments of that original paper, or aspects of those developments, have also been presented at The

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